

May 1, 2020

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The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

You have often said that closing the digital divide is your top priority, and you have touted the recently released 2020 Broadband Deployment Report as a clear indication of the progress being made. To me, the report is a stark reminder of just how far we have to go. The report claims that 98% of West Virginians have access to fixed broadband or mobile LTE coverage despite the fact that I already proved these maps wrong; despite the fact that I've already sent you 330 speed tests I've received from my constituents who know their maps are wrong; and despite the fact that I'm sending you another 107 speed tests again today from more constituents who know their maps are wrong.

We both know that the broadband coverage results published in this report are based on inaccurate and overstated coverage data. Your report claims that 16 counties in West Virginia have the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) definition of fixed broadband (25/3 Mbps) deployment of over 90% (Berkeley, Boone, Cabell, Hancock, Hardy, Harrison, Jackson, Jefferson, Kanawha, Logan, Marion, Mercer, Ohio, Raleigh, Wood, and Wyoming). However, I have sent you multiple fixed-broadband speed test letters from 15 of these counties showing actual speeds well below that threshold. Additionally, your report states that 10 counties in West Virginia have 100% deployment of the most basic mobile LTE (5/1 Mbps). However, I have sent you multiple speed tests from three of these counties (Berkeley, Morgan, Wood) with speeds well below that threshold. Clearly, West Virginians experiences on the ground are not matching the rosy picture painted in the 2020 Broadband Deployment Report.

Every West Virginian knows that it is nearly impossible to get reliable broadband access in many areas of our state, and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it daily reminders of the challenges this presents to our students, our businesses, and our families trying to navigate these uncertain times. That's why I've fought to expand access to hotspots so students can continue their education and businesses can stay connected with their customers. As we work on the next COVID-19 aid package, I am also working to ensure the next round of broadband infrastructure funding is distributed according to reliable, accurate maps. We cannot close the digital divide until we resolve the data divide between the FCC maps and the actual service on the ground.

Fortunately, earlier this year, Congress came together to unanimously pass the Broadband DATA Act which included bipartisan, commonsense reforms that will improve the FCC coverage maps. I was encouraged by your testimony that updating these maps is “an issue of months not years”, and I stand ready to work with you to do just that. Because affordable, reliable broadband service is no longer a luxury. It is a basic necessity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III